

[Charlie and Lucinda Robinson]

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Federal Writers' Project

Paul [Diggs?]

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Robinson, Charlie and Lucinda

408 W. 5th Street

Lakeland, Florida

CHARLIE AND LUCINDA ROBINSON - PLOWMAN AND COOK.

The home of Charlie and Lucinda is located in the "Teaspoon Hill" section of Lakeland, Florida. This sandy street is thickly populated with colored people who live in good and bad houses. Some are home owners and others renters. Charlie happens to be one who is trying to purchase his home from Oxford and Oxford Attorney. His purchase price for the home was [\$ 350.00?]. His monthly payments are \$ 6.00 per month which he has kept up to date.

Charlie specializes in preparing tracts of land for planting. He is one of the few who owns a mule and an old Model T Ford, and who makes a living doing this kind of work in and around the community. With a [scarlity?] [scarcity?] of men who can plow up small tracts and who own a horse or mule, he is in demand for this type of work. His wife Lucinda,

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works out in service, cooking for Mr. Bogan, on South Florida Avenue. She receives \$ 4.00 a week for her service.

Charlie is a hustling tall raw-boned man, very talkative, and brown in complexion. Having come in from plowing up a tract of land, he was dressed in his work clothes with a wide brim straw hat with a black border on his head.

Lucinda, is five feet-five inches in height, light brown in complexion, and very friendly. She had on her house dress which was very clean. [She?] said, "I was born in Wiggins, Georgia, May 18, 1890.

Charlie, after resting on his back steps, arose and said, "come in. We are hard working folks. Lucinda is getting my dinner. Don' you [smell?] them good fish cooking. We will have 2 some good old King fish, Have you ever eaten any fish like that? Lucinda knows how to cook them good and brown too, just crisp, and the bones and all go with the fish when she cooks them."

We walked to the front room in the house, and the odor from the fish frying permeated all through your nostrils. Charlie said he was like the ant, "The [and?] ant will consider his ways, but will work all his day."

"I came to Lakeland, September 15, 1919, from a saw mill camp at McClinney, Georgia. I was born in Washington County, Georgia, May 3, 1886. I practically lived there all of my life. My parents were Josh and Susan Robinson. Father has been dead eighteen years, and mother twenty years. There were sixteen children in all in the family. Only five of us are still living. Boyer, he lives in Sandersville, Georgia. [Willie?] and Reser, I don't know where they are. I havn't heard from them in years. My sister Anna lives in Warthen, Georgia. The older a fellow gets the more forgetful he is. I used to have good memory, but I have to set and study now. Plenty happened when I lived in Georgia, I have to dig it up bit by bit. I used to cut wood, and attend cows. I remembered when I would help mama every Wednesday with her work. When I was twenty years old, I left home and went to

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Davisboro, Georgia, to live with my father's sister. I only stayed there three weeks. I was always considered a mother's boy because I loved my mother, and would often listen to her talking about slavery. She said, "that she was fourteen years old when freedom was declared. She would tell how they sold and whipped the slaves and how she had to sleep on moss placed on the hard clay floors. I imagine those were some hard 3 times. And just think, she lived through it all. Up until my mother died I would send her part of my earnings."

" I had to work to make a living because my parents were poor and I didn't have much time to go to school. I only went to school three weeks in my life. My first wife taught me how to read and write. Some how or another she was smarter than I was. Last year, I went to the WPA Adult School in the Palace Casena. I didn't learn very much because the young man who taught me was not too far advance himself. So I quit this school."

" I think education is much needed. If it was not so, one could not get into big jobs. In fact, I believe mother wit is good, but give me education. Children and grown people are not taking advantage of education today. Now that they have the priviledge to do these things, they won't accept it. We have teachers today who really are not fit, who are not taking care of the children. If we could learn to be obedient to one another we could come out alright. My old mule must listen to me. I use my old Model T. Ford sometimes. It has to be kept right to run. It is like people who if they are right, can make the grade. When a man gets his education, he must refresh himself."

" I make good use of that old Ford. I use it to pull out stumps. I recall the first money I made back in Georgia was 75¢ a day. That was way back in [1809?]. I worked, too, for the Southern Railroad Company at Mitchell, Georgia, for three years. I guess I was around twenty three or four years old. The next job I had was with the Grits Mill at Warthen, Georgia. On this job I made \$ 7.50 a week. I held this job until I got tired of it. After that I went to sawing wood. I worked up to \$ 1.50 4 a day. When I came to Florida, I worked for Cummer Lumber Lumber Company, at McClinney, Florida. The work I did was piece work

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making ties at 10¢ a tie. some days I made as high as [\$?] 5.00. I followed that work until I came to Lakeland. I worked for the American Express Company for five years making \$113.40 a month. Afterwards, I worked for the Atlantic Coast Line, packing boxes and later they transferred me from there to the road house with the machinist as a helper at 40¢ an hour. Later I was promoted to a fireman at \$ 210.00 a month. I fired until they rolled me. Rolling means to be cut off from your work. That's what they call it on the railroad. And I have been rolled every since. They kept me on the extra board for a long time. They have a board where they list your name for turns out on a run. I never did get many turns out after that. I had to do something, so I began to handling horses and mules. Today I am satisfied behind my old mule “ [Beck” .?] With Beck I make a living some how. I manage to average around eight and ten dollars a week plowing up lots for people. I like it very well. I am my own boss.”

“My mule, Beck, is fourteen years old and a good worker. If people obeyed like Beck, they would be O.K. You have to watch a mule though. They will stop on you when you least expect. If you work a horse against a mule, the horse will fag out. The mule, if you will notice sometimes, have wider nostrils than a horse, and can pull more due to having greater wind.”

“ I used to be a crack shot. Today I was near the place where they slaughter cows. The white man out there called me over to the pen and said, “ uncle, can you shoot a rifle? ”

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He didn't know I was once considered good back in Georgia. They used to bar me at some of the shooting matches around home. I picked up the rifle and walked back about thirty feet and shot the bull right in the middle of his head. He rushed up and stuck him with a knife soon as he fell. He said, “ uncle you are a good shot, too good for words. L learned that from hunting when I was a boy, I use to roam the woods and could bring home game any time. They don't hunt down here in Florida like they did in Georgia. During my days,

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most any one of any size could shoot a rifle. What they call sport down here is skin and shoot crap. They don't know what the woods is."

" I believe in decency. I was carried away with that speech Madame Bethune made. She said, "you have to be decent, keep clean, and have a clean place to live." I take a bath every day I live. I believe a person should be decent in everything. In religion more so. I belong to the Freewill Baptist Church, pastored by Rev. Williams, over on Fourth Street. A whole lot of fogyism is going on amongst our people. I feel if I leave Jesus Christ out I will do the wrong thing. I don't believe in cutting the monkey with religion. Sin can weight you down. You can get so far down you can't ride. If I know I am doing wrong, I shouldn't do it. a man or a woman aught to use common sense. Many people don't believe in religion. A man ought to be strong and go on his way like David. I feel like the Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want."

" I have never voted in my life. I always figured if I cast a vote, to a man that is worthwhile, he ought to do the right thing. I have seen times when things were better. In my 6 fathers time, if a man did what he said, he would be kept in office. Times have changed now. A farmer, back in my fathers time would go to the next farm and help the other farmer. If they killed a hog or cow they would give some of it to their neighbors. You see if they do that now."

" There has been so many changes, I think our present form of goverment is good, except one thing, that commodity part. I believe if the people were given money it would help out better. Some people I [know?] now get so much of the same thing they exchange it with other people. Maybe I am talking too much. But that's the truth. Everybody is not like me, I like to work, and will work. Work is honorable. A man lives long when he works [hard?]. "

" I am happy with what little I get now, when I look around and see how some people live. I am thankful, too. I have a good wife, that's something to be thankful for. We married in

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Bartow, Florida, 1927. My first wife I was telling you about died in Sandersville, Georgia. She was a Hattie Jackson. One child was born and died three weeks after child birth.”

Lucinda had left the kitchen, and came in to the room. She sat on the edge of the bed, and told her husband that his dinner was ready. She asked, “what is all of this for”? Charlie said, “never mind, he is taking census of us. I have nothing to hide about my life. I mean to tell all I know about myself and you too. ”

Charlie joined his wife at the table where she had cooked a large platter of fish, piled high. Sweet potatoes, strawberry 7 jam, butter, corn bread, and coffee made up the rest of their meal. Charlie said, “ I like to eat most anything, but can't do so on account of some of my teeth being out.” Lucinda said, “ I can eat anything. I like to cook, and after I get through cooking for white folks, I have to come home and cook for Charlie.” Charlie likes to drink his coffee out of large bowl, and soon called for another filling up of the bowl.

“ We both enjoy good health. We hardly ever have a doctor to come to our home. Lucinda stated that she works everyday and never lay off on account of illness. Charlie said, “ work hard and eat good, that will keep you fit.”

After Charlie had finished his dinner and called again for another bowl of coffee, he said, “this is part of my life, to drink coffee. Good coffee is the life of you.” He retired to the front room where he lit the lamp, as it was getting dark. He has no electricy in his home. Lamps was the only source of light. He stated that a gallon of kerosene would run him all the week for his lamps. He said that he wanted to improve his home when he has finished paying for it.

This wooden built house consists of four rooms. It is unpainted with a small porch extending the width of the front. On the porch, turned against the house, were two delapidated wicker chairs. Another wicker chair was under one of the orange trees in the front yard. A mail box was nailed to a large post standing in front of the house. That was shaded by a tall cedar tree that towered over the building. There are five medium sized

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orange trees on his lot, filled with oranges. On the east side of the yard lies a pile of long logs, 8 to be cut for fire wood.

There are five crudely built out houses raised off the ground on wooden logs, used for his pets and chickens. In one were two large rabbits. Part of the back yard is given over to garden space where he has planted collards, mustards, corn, and onions. A small calf is fenced in beside the shed used for his mule Beck. In front of his shed is a pile of hay. On the [east?] side is a wired enclosure for his few chickens. A jet black cat roams around and occasionally rubs her fur against you. And Beck stands perfectly still and flickers her ears now and then. Beck is chestnut light brown in color, and very large in size. The wagon is home built and crudely made. He used it to carry his farm [implements?] back and forth to his jobs. Under one of the orange trees there is a bench on which were three large wash tubs. Near this is a pump with a sink placed on legs, very rusty from outdoor exposure. The out-house sits far back in the yard. Charlie has no sewer connection to his property. Wood, an old oil burner, ice box, and odds and ends are stacked on the porch.

Entering the kitchen from this porch, there is a large round table sitting in the center of the floor, a wood stove in the South-West corner, a large new Ice refrigerator, and china closet, where the dishes and kitchen utensils are stored. The floor is bare of covering.

There is a wide partition over which hangs two white curtains. This room is used for the front room and bed-rooms. A fire place is on the West side. In one corner there is a small table, two old trunks, and a two deck book rack filled with old books. A three quarter bed was near the partition, 9 with clean covering on it. A few chairs and an old rug made up the rest of the furnishing. The next room on the East side of the house was their bed room, where a curtain hung over the door. In this room was a double bed, a dresser, a wash stand, and two chairs. On the floor was an old rug. All of the windows had shades to them, some were worn with a few holes in them, and the walls in the two front rooms were ceiled.

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Charlie was inclined to talk more about his work, “ I am now cleaning up a large track of land for a white man, from the north. He has a large orange grove in the South section of Lakeland. [?]y white folks are good to me. They give me plenty of work. I have bargain to plow a ten acre tract for half of what I raise, with Katiba, the grocery-man on North Florida Avenue. I have considered it, but will have to wait until I finish the present contract. I have asked the owner for several lots near-by which I will plow up and put into sweet potatoes. There is plenty of planting space around in this section. If folks would only get out into the sun and raise something we would be better off. The soil is getting just right for spring planting. I have worked the soil so long that I know when it is right to plant seeds. Turn the soil over now and let it lay for about a week to take the souring out of it. If you follow the Ladies Birthday Almanac you will never go wrong. Back home, folks would be busy getting Almanac's the first of the year. That's was their Bible through crop times. When you are fooling with gardens and doing a little farming, you have to know what to do, when to plant, any old time will not do. I always tell my white folks when to put their seed in the soil. You know I help them, that helps me.

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Lucinda works all day, and we try hard to save what little little we make. Neither one of us is getting any younger and we must look out for a roof over our head.”

“When I am not working out, I work around the house. I am planning to put in another room and also want to put wire fence around the place. I read the newspapers once in a while. I just receive the Advocate, a church paper. It is all right, but I don't like the idea of raising money to educate people away from your home. They have a fund to educate boys in a school up in North Carolina, when I think we should take care of the boys here at home.”

“[We?] should have a colored paper in this section so we could read about one another. Christ told John to hold fast until I come again, to see the morning star. I mean we should hold fast to some of the things needed at home. ”

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“My greatest habit is smoking cigarettes, I don't drink liker ”

Lucinda stated that she usually work around the house and hoe in the garden when she comes home from work. Charlie laughlyng said, “when I can keep her home from the neighbors.” This time he called her “Coot” finding this after noon when another visit was made, that they had run short of coffee, I will go to the store and get you a dime worth Coot, he said. Yes when he want to be nice he always say Coot to me. When out in company he says Lucinda.

Charlie, grabed his large straw hat, and hastened to the store for his favorite drink. On the way he express his appreciation in being considered for a story. “I know now that my life has been worth while. It pays for a fellow to live right.